



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are lifelong developmental disabilities that are defined by unusual development in the areas of social interaction, communication, and behaviors/interests. In addition, unusual patterns in learning, attention, and sensory processing are often present. Until recently, limited information was available regarding how many children in the United States may be affected by an ASD, and many parents and others are concerned that the rates may be rising. As many as 3–6 of every 1,000 children may have an ASD. Currently, no cure for ASDs has been identified; the most effective treatment is intensive behavioral intervention. For each child with an ASD, special education costs exceed \$8,000 a year; a specially structured program costs approximately \$30,000 per year, and care in a residential school costs \$80,000–\$100,000 a year.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

- Established the *Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network* with several state partners to develop active, population-based monitoring programs for autism and related developmental disorders in their regions.
- Awarded funding for five Centers of Excellence for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Epidemiology (CADDRE) to conduct collaborative studies on the prevalence and causes of autism and related developmental disabilities.
- Funded a prevention project at Marshall University Autism Training Center in West Virginia to prevent secondary conditions among children with autism and reduce stress in their families. This project also conducts a prevalence study of ASDs in six counties.
- Reported prevalence rates for autism in Metropolitan Atlanta.
- Collaborated with Danish investigators to report findings from a population-based study of measles, mumps, and rubella vaccination and autism.
- Began the Web-based Autism Information Center: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddautism.htm.
- Developed productive partnerships with autism advocacy organizations, including the Autism Society of America, The National Alliance for Autism Research, and Cure Autism Now.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

- Continue to develop the autism monitoring programs of the ADDM Network in order to monitor secular trends in the prevalence rates and to determine whether the prevalence is increasing.
- Collaborate with the Centers of Excellence to monitor ASDs and begin a case-controlled study of its causes.
- Partner with Danish researchers to investigate biomarkers for autism.
- Develop a data coordinating center to facilitate collaborative research.
- Improve identification of ASD-affected children through community education.
- Collaborate with partners to improve the early screening and identification of children with ASDs and other developmental disabilities, enhancing the quality of life of children with ASD.

For further information about this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs

February 2003